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X.—THE DURATION OF THE CANTERBURY PILGRIMAGE.

The question as to how many days Chaucer conceived his Canterbury pilgrimage as occupying is of interest for a number of reasons. The consideration of it takes us more familiarly into the time and place where we may behold

“ the nine and twenty ride
Through those dim aisles their deathless pilgrimage,
Lady and monk and rascal laugh and chide,
Living and loving on the enchanted page.”

But the matter may also throw welcome light on such questions as how thoroughly Chaucer planned out the *Canterbury Tales* and how far their present shape is due to his conscious design. Tyrwhitt¹ accepted, though with some misgivings, the primitive and impossible assumption that the journey lasted but one day, which till within a generation or so was the usual view.² A duration of two days has been occasionally suggested, but never seriously advocated, I believe. Dr. Furnivall³ in 1868 suggested the four-days (or three-and-a-half-days) journey, which has since been generally accepted.⁴ Only Dr. John Koch, so far as I know, has advocated a three-days journey, a scheme rejected earlier

¹ Vol. iv, 328-9 (London, 1830) ; p. 206 (Routledge, 1871).

² Professor Skeat admits its possibility in his *Chaucer*, vol. v, p. 132, but denies it in iii, 375, and v, 415. Cf. also W. Hertzberg in his German translation of the *Canterbury Tales* (Hildburghausen, 1866), pp. 666-7.

³ *Temporary Preface*, pp. 41-3.

⁴ See Skeat, iii, 376 ; Mr. George Shipley, *Modern Language Notes*, x, columns 265-6 ; Mr. A. W. Pollard, *Globe Chaucer*, p. xxviii.

by Furnivall,¹ with the lodging-places Rochester and Ospring. This scheme, with Dartford and Ospring as lodging-places, I propose now.

Chaucer had been absolutely familiar with the entire route for years, it must be remembered; I do not believe there is the least indication of a connection between the *Canterbury Tales* and any pilgrimage of Chaucer's own, but he had been over the road again and again in his journeys between London and the Continent. So it is fair to assume that he would not have violated what was usual in real journeys between London² and Canterbury, at any rate without in some manner showing the eccentricity of his conception; and on this subject I am fortunate in having some light which these who have formerly treated this subject had not, mostly supplied by Professor Ewald Flügel and Dr. Furnivall.³ Disregarding several journeys on which nothing can be based, either because they occurred as late as the 16th century or were very much interrupted, we may consider the records of thirteen journeys in the 14th and 15th centuries. Of these, three took only one day, but with modifying circumstances in each case; one was achieved in 1381 by

¹ *The Chronology of Chaucer's Writings* (Chaucer Society, 1890), 59, 63; *Pardoner's Tale* (Berlin, 1902), p. xxi; *Temp. Pref.*, 39.

² Sometimes Eltham, for persons connected with the court; but it makes no difference, for these travellers all stopped over night at Dartford.

³ See *Anglia*, xxiii, 239-241; *Temp. Pref.*, 14-15, 119-132, and corrections and additions to p. 15 (the citation from Froissart is the same as Flügel's fifth case; see Froissart's *Chronicles*, edited by Kervyn de Lettenhove, xvi, 221); Koch, *Chronology*, 79-80 (a note by Furnivall on 16th century royal journeys, which I do not consider; given again in *Notes and Queries*, 8 Ser., i, 474); Furnivall in *Academy*, L, 14; E. A. Bond in *Archæologia*, xxxv, 453-469. See also *Notes and Queries*, 8 Ser., i, 522-3, and Henry Littlehales, *Notes on the Road between London and Canterbury* (Ch. Soc., 1898). For an interesting essay on roads and travel in the Middle Ages, see F. S. Merryweather, *Glimmerings in the Dark* (London, 1850), pp. 40-63.

the dowager Princess of Wales in mortal terror of Jack Straw's rebels, and two by several citizens of Canterbury, men, and from London to Gravesend were by water. Three took two days; two of them by these same men (once partly by water), and the other apparently by men only.¹ Four took three days; one by two knights,² the other three by large companies of people (one of them by Queen Philippa on her first entry into England). Three took four days;³ two of these journeys were pilgrimages by the dowager Queen Isabella, "the She-wolf of France," in 1357 and 1358, and the other was by King John of France, in 1360, who took four days from Eltham, where he had gone the day before from London.⁴

The four-days journeys are of the less value as parallels to Chaucer's, because it is pretty clear that they were more of the nature of royal progresses⁵ and strictly religious devotions than of ordinary pilgrimages; both King John and Queen Isabella heard masses and gave copious alms on the way, and clearly travelled in much state. Isabella's journeys are especially non-significant, though they have been the ones most quoted as offering parallels. She was far advanced in

¹ See *Academy*, L, 14, and *Angl.*, XXIII, 240. Froissart curiously says that the latter went "à petites journées."

² See Flügel's quotation from Froissart; Professor Skeat is somewhat mistaken here (I, xix).

³ *N. and Q.*, l. c., p. 523; *Temp. Pref.*, 120-130.

⁴ It does not seem that time of year made very much difference, as has sometimes been suggested. One of the 1-day journeys was in June, and two in October; two of the 2-days in October and the other in March; of the 3-days, one was in April, one in December or January, and the other two seem to have been in winter, though this is not certain; the 4-days journeys were in June, October and July. This suggests that the state of the road was not very variable, and this that it cannot have been so bad after all; or else that three days was the usual time when the roads were in their worse state, and that, when they were best, people might either rush things, or else linger in order to enjoy themselves.

⁵ So with the 16th century journeys that have been adduced.

years, and so was the Countess of Warren, who accompanied her.¹ More than this, she was in very poor health.² Should two old women, one of them a sick queen-dowager, set the pace for Chaucer's pilgrims?

It is interesting also to notice the stages of the journey, and where these various travellers spent the nights. The distance from Southwark to Canterbury is 57 miles or over; to Dartford is 15 miles, to Rochester 15 more, to Ospring 17 and over, and to Canterbury a little over 9. Eltham is 7 miles from Southwark. On the two-day journeys the travellers slept once at Rochester and once at Gravesend (because they took boat there and probably had to wait for the tide); on the three-day journeys, at Dartford and Rochester three times, and at Dartford and Ospring once; on the four-day journeys, always at Dartford, Rochester and Ospring.³ These are the only lodging-places found in these records.⁴

¹And appears to have been a friend of her youth (*Archæologia*, xxxv, 456). The Countess was a granddaughter of Edward I., and was married in 1305. Isabella was born in 1292, so was nearly seventy.

²"Respecting Isabella's death, she is stated by chroniclers to have sunk, in the course of a single day, under the effect of a too powerful medicine, administered at her own desire. From several entries, however, in this account [the document from which all this information is gained contains many entries as to medicines and physicians for the queen, the latter, apparently, sometimes summoned in haste] it would appear that she had been in a state requiring medical treatment for some time previous to her decease" (*Arch.*, xxxv, 462), which took place 22 August, 1358 (*ib.*, 455), two or three months after her second pilgrimage. Considering all this, her two elaborate pilgrimages within nine months, her death shortly after, and St. Thomas' repute as a healer, it seems pretty clear that she was seeking his help against a lingering and fatal disease. In this case we should expect her to travel slowly.

³Isabella stopped here on her return, which thereafter followed a different route. Froissart himself did the same (*Angl.*, xxiii, 241). On a different journey she went from Leeds Castle to Rochester in one day, thence to Dartford in a second, thence to London in a third (*Arch.*, xxxv, 462). Leeds is 10 m. S. E. of Rochester. Froissart, with Richard II. and his suite, went from Leeds Castle through Rochester and Dartford to Eltham in two days or less (*Chronicles*, tr. by T. Johnes, iv, 65-6).

⁴King John, and the citizens of Canterbury on their four journeys, dined

Now for Chaucer's pilgrims. We may reject the idea of a one or two-days journey;¹ not only is it inharmonious with what the records and good sense alike show must have been usual for such bodies of people, but it seems clear that the poem itself indicates two nights passed *en route*. In the first place, if we accept as Chaucerian the arrangement of either the modern editions or of the manuscripts, it is nearly certain that a night intervened between Group A and the Man of Law's Prologue, as is the general view.² In the Reve's Prologue, 3906-7, the pilgrims are near Greenwich at (say) half-past seven o'clock; in the Man of Law's Prologue, 14, it is only ten, yet four or five tales later they are near Rochester (Monk's Prol., 3116), nearly thirty miles farther. Though we must not assume that Chaucer's notes of time were all carefully studied with reference to each other, such quick going is a presumption against putting all this on one day. But more than this, it seems to me that Chaucer, if he thought what he was about when he wrote the Man of Law's Prologue, meant it to open the day's story-telling. In lines 17-19 the Host warns the rout that the fourth part of the day is gone, and exhorts them to lose no time; in 32-38 he urges them not to mould in idleness, and reminds the lawyer of his contract. Here again, of

at Sittingbourne, 11 miles from Rochester and 6 or 7 from Ospring. The Sumnour had promised to make the Friar wince before they came "to Sidingborne" (D, 847). So when he ends

"My tale is doon, we been almost at tounne,"

this may refer, as Furnivall opines (*Temp. Pref.*, 42), to such a stop. Or if Chaucer did not go into such minutiae—and it is easy to exaggerate the minor realisms of the poem—it may refer to the arrival at Ospring, which it can be shown must have come between Groups D and E, not (as is usually assumed—cf. *Temp. Pref.*, p. 43) between E and F.

¹ So Shipley, *Mod. Lang. Notes*, x, 264-6; *Temp. Pref.*, 38-41 (though Furnivall leaves the 2-days journey a faint possibility); Skeat, III, 375-6.

² See, e. g., Skeat, III, 376-7; *Temp. Pref.*, 42.

course, we cannot be sure that the passage was not written without regard to a time-scheme; but if they had had at least four tales before ten o'clock, and two since half-way prime, the pilgrims certainly deserved no warning to *carpere diem* or rebuke for moulding in idleness; and the charge to the Man of Law sounds like a reminder, after a few hours of general talk, of an agreement made a day or two before. It certainly seems best so far to put one night at Dartford, a place clearly indicated by the records, where all the three and four days travellers slept. As to the last night, Skeat¹ shows conclusively by the Canon's Yeoman's Prologue, 555-6, 588-9, that it must have been passed at Ospring,² a conclusion also favored by the records.

Since a five-days journey is not to be thought of, the question is between three and four. Although the latter and usually-accepted view, with a third stop at Rochester, is not impossible, I believe that the evidence, both internal and external, strongly favors the former. In the first place, there is distinct if not decisive evidence that Chaucer did not conceive the party as stopping at Rochester. In the Monk's Prologue (3116-7) the Host says to him:

"Lo! Rouchestre stant heer faste by!
Ryd forth, myn owene lord, brek nat our game."

This no more suggests a stop at Rochester than the "Lo Depedeford!", "Lo Grenewich!", of the Reve's Prologue, 3906-7, suggest stops at these places. It certainly means that they were very close to Rochester; yet nobody objects when the Monk proposes to deliver a selection from his hundred tragedies, perhaps followed by a Life of St. Edward. When he is choked off, after nearly 800 lines, the bells are

¹ Vol. v, 415.

² Which is, precisely as Chaucer says, somewhat under five miles back from Boughton. A writer in *Notes and Queries* (8 Ser., I, 523) suggests Feversham, which seems unlikely and comes to the same thing as regards distance.

still clinking on his bridle (3984-5); then follows the tale of the Nun's Priest, after which the Host even calls on someone else. Does not this indicate that the pilgrims passed Rochester without stopping, at all events for any length of time? And, in the second place, the three-days journey is distinctly confirmed by the records; we have seen that, out of the thirteen journeys, the number of those which occupied three days is larger (four), and the travellers more like Chaucer's, than is the case with any of the others.

This strongly confirms the view that the first night was spent at Dartford. Since the records indicate no other lodging-places than these two on the London side of Ospring, the pilgrims must have slept at Dartford unless they went 47 miles the first day and only 9 the second. This point is particularly important because my conclusion will not be invalidated by the view, which I believe, and shall hope to support on a later occasion, that the arrangement of the groups in the manuscripts is not due to Chaucer. Against securing a two-days journey by putting the Man of Law's Prologue and Tale after Group F or Group G, which there is not the slightest reason to do, there is the argument that the Squire's "pryme" (F, 73) indicates the second day and that, as we have seen, the Man of Law's Prologue seems to indicate that on that day nothing had preceded it. But, above all, this view will not invalidate the main premises, that a night was spent at Ospring, and none at Rochester.

The only possible objection to this scheme is that stopping only at Dartford and Ospring divides the journey into very unequal stages, 15, 32 and 9 miles, and puts short distances into the first and last days, when we know the party made an early start or travelled long. But we have seen that just these stops were made in an actual journey, in which case the division was still more uneven, for the first stage was only eight miles, from Eltham. And in the other cases of a three-days journey, by considerable bodies of people, it was

little less uneven,—26, 15 and 8 (in one case 15) miles for each day respectively. It is clear that the only places where there were satisfactory accommodations were Dartford, Rochester and Ospring, and if people wished to take only three days they had no choice but to make things uneven; it would have been less uneven to have travelled from Rochester to Canterbury on the third day, but the only certain stopping-place we have found is Ospring, so this we know Chaucer's pilgrims did not do. There is certainly no ground for believing that, on one of the most travelled roads in England, it would be difficult for a collection of able-bodied people, even including a Prioress and a Shipman and some persons with indifferent mounts, to travel thirty-two miles in one day.¹

The conclusion which I have suggested seems more perfectly than any other to follow from the evidence, both internal and external, and to involve fewer incongruities. It involves no actual inconsistencies. What improprieties there are, such as crowding tales into the early mornings and the unequal assignments to the several days, are due mainly to the unfinished state of the work, a condition which deserves frequent emphasis. If Chaucer had in mind any definite scheme at all, which there is no sufficient reason to deny, we seem justified in concluding that the days of his pilgrimage were three.

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¹ They started at a good rate (Prol., 825). Cf. *New English Dictionary*: "*Canterbury pace*—supposed originally to designate the pace of the mounted pilgrims"; "*Canter*. A Canterbury gallop; an easy gallop." Furnivall casts aspersions on the road (*Temp. Pref.*, 15-17), but the slough may have been only at the side (*ib.*, Corr. and Add.). My scheme agrees well with 16th century customs. "Twenty miles a day in winter, and thirty in summer, were in the sixteenth century reckoned in official accounts a day's journey. Members of Parliament were paid on this basis." E. Porritt, *The Unreformed House of Commons* (1903), p. 157.